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ABSTRACT

To determine whether racial identity attitudes could be predicted from socioeconomic variables, 174 Black college students were asked to respond to items on the Racial Identity Attitude Scale and to complete a personal data sheet. Results indicated that racial identity attitudes and socioeconomic status appear to represent separate constructs. Socioeconomic variables did not predict attitudes. Thus, it may be important to consider the subjects' individualized attitudes toward themselves and their ascribed racial group. Researchers cannot assume automatically that being Black means that one identifies with Blacks or Black culture, or that being Black and middle or upper class means that one does not identify with Black socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status may indicate social position and economic resources, both of which are based on external criteria, but racial identity attitudes appear to be related more to internal functioning than to external forces. Thus, the present study supports Cross's argument that personal identity and reference group identity may be different. In other words, it may be possible for a Black person to feel good about him- or herself and have mixed or negative feelings toward his or her racial group. (Author/KH)

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The Relationship Between Racial Identity Attitudes and Socioeconomic Status

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RUNNING HEAD: Socioeconomic Status

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A long standing debate in the personality literature concerns the question of whether socioeconomic characteristics or adaptations to Black culture best explains the personality development of Black Americans. On one side of the debate, according to Steele and Davis (1984), are the proponents of the social class or culture of poverty theory. They believe that social class status is the most crucial variable for explaining Black personality characteristics. Wilson (1978), for instance, argues that reactions to racial discrimination and oppression were important and salient factors affecting Black culture and personality styles during the pre-industrial and industrial periods. However, he belives that during the modern or post-industrial period, socioeconimic status rather than racial adapations became a more salient variable in determining Black development. In his culture of poverty theory, Lewis (1966) has argued that the personality traits attributed to Blacks (e.g., low self-esteem, poor motivation, and impulsiveness) are actually characteristics of poor people regardless of race.

On the other side of the debate are the proponents of the cultural integritivistic or integrity models (e.g., Boykin, 1981; Cross, 1971). These authors hold that Blacks' socialization experiences rather than their social class standing are the most salient features influencing Black culture and personality development. According to the cultural integrity or integritivistic perspective, Black culture and personality is best explained through an understanding of the complex and varied reactions individual Blacks have had to the socialization

process. Adherents of the cultural integrity model believe that identification with one's ascribed racial group (i.e., racial identity) represents a reference group orientation which is not determined by other reference groups such as socioeconomic class. Racial identity attitudes represent the extent to which persons hold positive, negative, or mixed attitudes toward their own racial or cultural group and their place in it (i.e., their attitude regarding their racial or cultural identity).

Cross (1971) proposed a cognitive developmental model of racial identity in which an individual is hypothesized to progress through a sequence of stages. According to Cross' model one begins in the Pre-encounter stage where one's racial identity attitudes are primarly pro-white and anti-black. That is, the individual devalues his or her ascribed race and racial group in favor of Euro-American culture. The Encounter stage is hypothesized to begin when the individual has an experience which challenges his or her view of Blackness. The next stage Immersion-Emersion involves learning and experiencing the meaning and value of one's race and unique culture. The Internalization stage is the stage of racial identity in which the individual achieves pride and security in his or her race and identity. The racial identity or cultural integrity model and studies which support it (Carter, 1984; Cross, 1982; Davidson, 1975; Hall, Cross, & Freedle, 1973; Milliones, 1974; Parham & Helms, 1981, 1984) suggests that Blacks in different stages and/or who hold differing racial identity attitudes have responded differently to their sociocultural enviroments. Racial identity attitudes appear

to represent a psychological orientation which reflects one's personal reaction to his or her psychosocial experiences.

There are few studies which have directly examined the relationship between Black cultural adaptations and socioeconomic status. The majority of studies have investigated the relationship between one or more general personality characteristices (e.g., self-concept) and socioeconomic status. However, empirical investigations by Bledsoe (1981), Osborne and LeGette (1982), and Brand, Padilla, & Ruiz's (1974) review of the ethnic identity literature reported positive relationships between socioeconomic status and ethnic identity, as measured by personality characteristics such as self-concept. For example, Bledsoe (1981), found "strong influences" due to economic status on self-concept among high school Blacks. Osborne and LeGette (1982) found that Blacks and low socioeconomic status subjects viewed themselves as less academically and socially capable than Whites with higher socioeconomic status. Brand et. al. (1974) reported studies which indicated that members of lower socioeconomic status groups have created a distinct cultural pattern due to their lower class status. These empirical studies appear to support the theoretical perspectives held by the social class theorists. In contrast, other empirical investigations report findings in the other direction. For example, in a study of public school students, Zirkel and Moses (1971) found that the self concept of Blacks did not significantly differ from and was often higher than that of Whites. Trowbridge, Trowbridge, and Trowbridge (1972) also found that lower socioeconomic status

children had higher self-concept scores than did middle socioeconomic status children. They also found that Blacks' self-concept was higher than other children in the study. Spencer (1982), in a study which investigated the relationships between personal and group identity, and socioeconomic status found that the majority of her sample of Black children had positive self-concepts and that these positive self-concepts were maintained across age groups regardless of socioeconomic status.

It seems that the literature is rather inconclusive regarding the relationship between socioeconomic status and Black racial identity. One reason for this ambiguity may be the lack of commonly agreed upon methods for operationalizing socioeconomic status for Black samples. In one camp are those (e.g., Wilson, 1978) who believe that racial identity and social class are synonymous and can be measured by traditional socioeconomic status indices (e.g., educational level). The other group argues that the two types of variables are similar only in that they both are indicants of reference group orientation (e.g., Smith, 1976) but that racial identity and social class identification actually represent adaptations to different reference groups.

It may be that social class and racial identity are synomynous. However, the review of the literature appears inconclusive and contradictory. If the social class adherents are correct then racial identity should be predictable from social class variables. However, if social class and racial identity are different constructs, then one would not expect such

predictability.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether racial identity attitudes could be predicted from socioeconomic status variables.

Methods

Subjects

Subjects were 174 Black students, freshmen through seniors, attending colleges and universities in the northeast region of the United States. In the sample, 104 of the subjects were Black students attending a predominately White eastern university and 70 were Black students attending a predominately Black community college in the northeast. The majority of subjects from the eastern university were solicited through psychology classes and received credit toward their course grades for participation in the study. A few of the Black subjects at the eastern university were solicited through the university's Afro-American studies department. These subjects did not receive course credit for participation in the study. Subjects ranged in age from 17 to 66 years, the sample consisted of 66 men and 108 women. Subjects from the northeastern community college were recruited from a number of classes, and none of these subjects received renumeration for participation in the study.

Instruments

The following instruments were used in this study: the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981), and a personal data sheet constructed for this study.

Racial Identity Attitude Scale. The Racial Identity Attitude

Scale adapted by Parham and Helms (1981) from Hall, Cross, and Freedle's (1973) Q-sort items, was designed to assess four of the stages in Cross's Negro-to-Black conversion model. The Scale consists of 30 items to which subjects responded using a five-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Scores for each stage were obtained by finding the mean of responses to the appropriately keyed items. Parham and Helms (1981) reported internal consistency reliability of .67, .72, .66 and .71 for the Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-emersion, and Internalization attitudes respectively.

Personal Data Sheet. The Personal Data Sheet was used to investigate personal characteristics (e.g., class level) and social class characteristics of subjects. As an indicant of their perceived socioeconomic status, reference group social class, subjects were asked to indicate their socioeconomic class by checking one of five categories (lower class, lower middle-class, middle class, upper class). As traditional indicators of socioeconomic status subjects were asked to provide information about their mothers' and fathers' educational levels, occupational status, and number of years at their occupation, by responding to open-ended questions or checking relevant categories.

Traditional socioeconomic status variables. The measures used to assess traditional socioeconomic status were selected on the basis of research reported by Stricker (1976). Stricker noted that measures of socioeconomic status are varied and diverse, and often do not reflect socioeconomic status of Blacks

accurately. Therefore, Stricker (1976) conducted a study in which he interviewed Black residents of Toledo, Ohio. Stricker used an interview schedule which included many of the widely used socioeconomic status variables and social status classification systems. Stricker factor analyzed the socioeconomic variables to determine a factor structure for Blacks (i.e., which variables seemed to reflect social status for Blacks). Variables from the factor structure which could be self-reported were included in the present study (e.g., parents educational level).

Procedure

Subjects were asked to respond to items on the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981) and the personal data sheet. Prior to completing the questionnaire, subjects were asked to complete the personal data sheet.

Data collection procedures varied at each institution. Subjects solicited through the department of psychology responded to posted sign-up sheets. These subjects reported to the room designated at the time indicated on the sign-up sheet. When subjects reported to the room, they were given a questionnaire packet by the experimenter or a trained assistant. Upon completion of the questionnaire packet each subject received a debriefing sheet outlining the goals and hypotheses of the study.

Subjects solicited through the Afro-American studies department at the eastern university were enrolled in classes in that department. Two instructors allowed the experimenter and a trained assistant to administer the questionnaire packet to their

classes during a scheduled class period. These subjects did not receive course credit for participation in the study.

The samlpe collected at the northeastern community college was solicited through cooperation of the school's administration and faculty. In a letter faculty were informed of the purposes of the study and some of their class time was requested. The experimenter was given a list of faculty who agreed to participate in the study when he arrived at the institution the questionnaire packets were administered to seven classes, ranging in size from 10 to 35 students. Prior to administration of the measures, students were told that the study was about Black culture and that their participation was voluntary. Upon completion of the questionnaire packet, each subject received the debriefing statement.

Results

To explore the question of whether socioeconomic status, as measured by traditional or reference group variables, was predictive of racial identity attitudes, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. The dependent variables in the regresion analyses were racial identity attitudes (Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization) and the independent variables were reference group socioeconomic status, mothers' and fathers' educational levels, mothers' and fathers' occupational status, mothers' and fathers' number of years on a job, students' own educational level, a missing data variable, and sex (sex was included in the

analyses because prevoius studies employing racial identity attitudes have found gender differences for the samples studied). Means and standard deviations are presented in table 1. +The number of subjects which reponded to the socioeconomic status measures varied, therefore a procedure recommended by Cohen & Cohen (1975) was followed to account for the missing data. According to Cohen & Cohen (1975), in multiple regression analyses in which data are missing, a new variable can be created by counting all variables for which responses are missing, when this new variable is entered in to the regression equation along with mean substitution for the missing variable(s), then all subjects can be included in the analyses, and one can tell whether failure to report social class (in this case) was a significant predictor of the dependent variables, racial identity attitudes.

None of the multiple regression analyses were significant. F-ratios for the overall models ranged from .37 to 1.08. This suggests that racial identity attitudes could not be predicated by socioeconomic status variables.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that socioeconomic status variables did not predict racial identity attitudes. At first

glance, this finding was puzzling. Since socioeconomic status has been assumed by both Black and White social scientists to be an important determinor of Black identity, one would expect to find significant relationships between racial identity attitudes and socioeconomic status. However, upon closer examination of the literature one finds that in the majority of published articles, including those studies that have compared different socioeconomic groups, Blacks typically have been treated as a homogeneous group with respect to racial identity. It seems that social scientists implicitly were assuming that if Blacks had different personality traits and cultural affiliations then it was primarily a function of social class membership. Steele and Davis (1984), for example, conducted a review of empirical and theoretical studies published in the Journal of Black Psychology from 1974-1980. They reported that 66% of the studies reviewed conceptualized Blacks as a homogeneous group. Of the 34% of the studies which conceptualized Blacks as diverse, 65% differentiated them on the bases of socioeconomic status. It may be that socioeconomic status differences do contribute to considerable personality and cultural variation among Blacks; however, such differences may not explain racial/cultural identification when it is complexly defined (i.e., when more than one within group variable is employed). Racial identity may also be an important variable to consider when Blacks are studied.

Racial Identity attitudes and socioeconomic status appear to represent separate constructs. Thus, it seems that it may be important to consider the subjects' or clients' attitudes toward

themselves and their ascribed racial group. Researchers can not assume automatically that if one is Black, that one identifies with Blacks or Black culture or that if one is middle class or upper class that one does not identify with Blacks or Black culture.

Socioeconomic status may be an important demographic variable indicating social position and economic resources, both of which are based on external criterion, however, racial identity attitudes appear to be related more to internal functioning then to external forces. It seems that this developmental psychosocial process is more a result of an individuals' interpretation of his or her socialization experiences and personal development than it is a reflection of actual external conditions imposed by social class.

Thus, previous research literature may have been inconclusive because in those studies in which general personality variables (e.g., self-concept, locus of control) have been used to define identity, researchers have usually failed to consider the question of whether their Black sample actually identified with Blacks or with Black culture. Furthermore, as Cross (1984) has noted social scientists have assumed that personal identity (i.e., self-concept) for Blacks was synonomous with reference group identity. The present study supports Cross' argument that personal identity and reference group identity may be different. It may be possible for a Black person to feel good about his or her self and have mixed or negative feelings toward his or her racial group.

The present study, however, is not without limitations. A major limitation of the study is the use of a procedure for measuring socioeconomic status that has seldom been used in the literature. The lack of any relationship may be a function of a different method for measuring socioeconomic status. However, social scientists have yet to agree on an appropriate measure of socioeconomic status for Blacks. As a result studies often vary in the manner in which socioeconomic status is measured. This variation in measurement may be at the center of the confusion regarding the social status of Blacks and their personality characteristics.

Future studies employing Black samples possibly should include some measure of racial identity as a means of exploring with-in group variation rather than assuming that socioeconomic status variables necessarily will reveal such variation.

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TABLE 1

Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for
Socioeconomic status and Racial Identity Variables

Socioeconomic Variables. [a]	M	S.D.
Years mothers' education	13.21	2.84
Years fathers' education	13.12	3.26
Mothers' occupational status	5.[illegible]	2.87
Fathers' occupational status	5.81	2.63
Mothers' years on job	15.23	8.16
Fathers' years on job	19.34	8.01
Years own education	13.78	0.99
Missing socioeconomic status	1.14	1.36
Reference group ses	2.74	.84
Racial identity attitudes.		
Pre-encounter	20.13	4.95
Encounter	12.06	2.80
Immersion-Emersion	22.09	4.36
Internalization	34.14	5.51

[a] N's for socioeconomic status variables ranged from 121 to 174 before mean substitution.